Hearing the *Houma*: Sound, Vision, and Urban Space in Moroccan Hip-Hop Videos

by <u>Ian VanderMeulen</u> | <u>Issue 12.1 (Spring 2023)</u>

ABSTRACT   This paper seeks to engage the construction of urban "soundscapes" as a potential flashpoint for class conflict by analyzing auditory and visual representations of "the neighborhood" (al-houma) in a handful of Moroccan hip-hop videos. I begin by situating Moroccan hip-hop within transnationally circulating associations of hip-hop with "urban" life, as well as the political dynamics of North Africa's colonial and postcolonial urban histories. I then analyze four videos comparatively, suggesting that each goes beyond lyrical and musical content of the songs to construct a sensory experience of the city—or neighborhood—for the listener-viewer. In giving attention to the political implications of each video, however, I argue that what distinguishes each is less what sort of "soundscape" emerges in his video but how each video teaches the audience to "hear" the Houma. While videos by mainstream rappers Muslim and Don Bigg figure urban space as threatening and in need of moral recuperation, they enact these pedagogies largely through indexical figurations of their respective soundscapes, that is, by directing the listener to attend to certain (inaudible) sounds and to interpret them in a certain way. By contrast, a video by El Haqed, known as a more staunchly oppositional figure, visually and sonically constructs a peri-urban lifeworld conditioned by neoliberal economic abandonment yet resistant to the postcolonial gaze. This contrast, I suggest, raises crucial questions about how hip-hop is linked to broader dynamics of cultural appropriation and "resistance" politics.

KEYWORDS   <u>media</u>, <u>resistance</u>, <u>urban</u>, <u>hip hop</u>, <u>sound</u>, <u>North Africa</u>, <u>Morocco</u>

From the start, the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, of sounds, in short of language.

–Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, *The German Ideology*[1]

How do we make "sense" of cities? How are urban landscapes built to fulfill certain aesthetic desires, and how do built environments train our senses in turn? Critical geographers and other post-Marxist theorists have been at the forefront of rethinking

urban space as both cultural construct and site for political engagement, in that its spatiotemporal affordances and constraints circumscribe flows of capital and facilitate or challenge potential class alliances. David Harvey was one of the first to note, in *The Urban Experience* and other works, that urban design is often utilized to promote separation and management of different social groups, thus giving a physical dimensionality to power differentials between labor and capital.[2] The built environment can provide "storage" for dormant capital, or an easy avenue for recirculation through "redevelopment" projects. In such approaches, the built environments of the city are irreducibly *material*. Building on Raymond Williams's slightly more expansive concept of "cultural materialism," however, analyzing cities might also encompass more sensory experiences and contestations of urban life.[3] Indeed, the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler—of a decidedly different theoretical orientation than Williams—proposes considering the city *itself* as a "medium" for communication, sensory interaction, and other forms of exchange.[4]

Inspired by such foundational interventions, this paper attempts to amplify sonic constructions of urban space as potential flashpoints of class conflict. As Marx's "agitated layers of air," sound is profoundly dual: irreducibly material (as a form of physical vibration) yet, in the sense of *agitation* it evokes, sound also emerges out of cultural contestation —"agitation" by and for whom? Numerous scholars have found this dual quality productive for thinking through the politics of listening and other sensory experiences. For Rowland Atkinson, for example, the material collision of sound waves with the built urban environment means that cities often have their own "sonic ecology." In this way, sound itself can act as a barrier—such as white noise drowning out unwanted sounds—or as a tool of social engineering—such as "functional music" intended to produce certain behaviors in commercial spaces or the workplace.[5] Thus, although R. Murray Schafer still serves an important reference for scholars of sound, his original idea of the "soundscape" has been roundly critiqued for its inadequate attention to the politics of such access and social engineering.[6] Indeed, as one important programmatic essay points out, the concept's implicit reference to landscape painting and photography belies an inescapable *subjectivity* in all sonic environments—their construction and eventual perception *by* and *for* unequal listeners and communities of hearers. As such, "soundscapes" must be engaged as mediated and temporally constrained environments.[7]

This paper seeks to contribute to such debates, and in particular the mediated and *mediating* qualities of urban soundscapes, by analyzing the sensory construction of urban space in a small selection of recent Moroccan hip-hop videos. Though my broader aim is to open up theoretical opportunities for thinking through the sensory politics of the urban imagination in audiovisual media, I take hip-hop's enduring—if problematic—associations with "urban" cultural aesthetics, as well as Morocco's complex urban histories, as productive starting points. The scholarly literature on hip-hop, particularly in the American

context, is rich and vast, rapidly expanding in recent years to include examinations not only of its broader racial, gendered, and class dynamics;[8] but also specific elements of performance and production, such as the role of the DJ and politics of musical borrowing and remixing.[9] While a parallel literature on the genre's "globalization" has been uneven, studies of Arabic-language hip-hop and other developments in the Middle East and North Africa/Southwest Asia and North Africa region (hitherto MENA/SWANA) have increasingly directed their critiques at the tendency of transnational media discourses to overdetermine hip-hop as a musical form of political "resistance," a framing that artists themselves routinely struggle with.[10] While this is particularly true in the case of the genre's romanticization during the regional uprisings of 2011, we can hear pre-echoes in David McDonald's study of the rise and evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli group DAM, particularly as the violence and contentiousness of the Second Intifada pushed them to incorporate more elements of a distinctly "Palestinian" musical tradition.[11]

I would suggest that one way of circumventing these dynamics, at least provisionally, might be to engage the specific histories and aesthetics of urban life and class consciousness that undergird hip-hop production in diverse MENA/SWANA contexts. In Morocco as in the United States, hip-hop arose in the midst of rapid neoliberal reforms that exacerbated class divisions in metropolitan areas, leading to the critiques of authority and inequality that are frequent in rap songs. As Jeffries argues, however, that characterization of rap music as an "urban" genre *par excellence* is a highly problematic one, a critical reflection that is no less relevant to the Moroccan context.[12] In fact, Moroccan class identities have long been forged and contested through articulations with the urban, from the vilification of rural peasants by members of the urban upper class to the French Protectorate's *internal* urban politics of separation to the prominence of the neighborhood (*lhouma*) as a site of identity-formation. In short, rather than romanticize hip-hop's urban pedigree, I take Morocco's striated urban histories as provocation for investigating how the urban imaginaries of hip-hop videos betray certain class orientations.

Finally, I want to propose that the music video genre itself offers a uniquely sensory interface from which to undertake such an investigation. I employ certain paradigmatic approaches to film sound, particularly Michel Chion's famous concept of the "audio-visual contract," alongside more recent sound studies scholarship that gives critical attention to the challenges of analyzing sound in urban space.[13] Since "there is no place of the sounds, no auditory scene already preexisting the soundtrack," Chion argues, the "soundtrack" to which the viewer-listener is attuned, and the sense of sonic space it elicits, is the result of a constructed and constructive *audio-visual synthesis*.[14] Moreover, since auditory experience *itself* has the distinguishing ability to "reconfigure space,"[15] space, in all its sonic richness, might be "conceived as plural, as the outcome of social and material practices, and as indivisible from time."[16] In pushing for such spatially oriented analysis of

Moroccan hip-hop videos, however, I intentionally eschew some of Chion's more elaborate sonic taxonomies for a more fluid approach. Instead, while taking the lyrical richness of my examples seriously, I also give focused attention to how other, non-verbal aspects of vocal performance contribute to a sense of "vocalic space" within each video's imagined urban ecology.[17]

The paper's interventions are built on a comparative analysis of two pairs of music videos. After situating the "first generation" of Moroccan rappers within a broader context of the country's musical and urban histories, I compare a video by international pop sensation Ahmed Chawki to a recent video by the rapper known as Muslim, to draw out stark contrasts in the type of urban "soundscape" such hip-hop videos construct. Subsequent videos by Don Bigg and El Haqed, the latter a favorite of the February 20, 2011 Movement, seem to reorient urban space and reimagine town and country relations, respectively. Considered comparatively, what sets El Haqed apart from the other two rappers, I argue, is less *what* sort of "soundscape" emerges in his video but *how*, and the different types of political "work" each video performs as a result. The videos by Muslim and Don Bigg figure urban space as threatening and in need of recuperation through *personal* responsibility and intervention—a pedagogical orientation that links neoliberal ideologies with state agendas of urban "renewal."

These videos also enact such pedagogies, largely through *indexical* figurations of their respective soundscapes. What I mean by this is that the audio-visual contract of their videos *directs* the listener to attend to certain (inaudible) sounds and to interpret them in a certain way. El Haqed, by contrast, visually and sonically constructs a peri-urban lifeworld conditioned by neoliberal economic *abandonment* yet resistant to the postcolonial gaze. In short, the different politics and class orientations of each video are firmly rooted in the very ways they teach us to "hear" the *houma*. I conclude by suggesting that El Haqed's effort to reconstruct a marginalized urban soundscape that is nonetheless *not* immediately legible as a form of "resistance" politics challenges scholars of hip-hop to rethink *other* ways the genre might be meaningful to practitioners and urban residents.

Making Hip-Hop Moroccan

Although hip-hop arrived in Morocco through cultural imports from France and the United States, the genre has been shaped significantly by existing local musical trends, in addition to longstanding and intersecting contestations over class identity and the partitioning of urban and rural spaces. Although this divide has roots in precolonial governance, which the Moroccan Sultanate conceived of through an opposition between an urbanite "territory of the state" (*bled al-makhzen*) and rural/mountainous "territory of resistance" (*bled al-siba*),

it is hard to argue against the exacerbating effects of the French Protectorate, established in 1912.[18] The Protectorate's "ideological foundations," Alessandra Ciucci argues, "rested in part upon a representation of Morocco as divided between city and countryside," an assumption built upon both precolonial governance ideologies as well as problematic translations of the fourteenth-century polymath Ibn Khaldun.[19] Moreover, since French colonial policy had by 1912 shifted from an agenda of assimilation to one aimed at the "preservation" of local cultures, the Protectorate sought to divide urban geographies *internally* as well, a practice of "urban apartheid" that cordoned off "traditional" urban networks and cultural heritage sites from modern development schemes in the "new" cities.[20]

Building on such colonial legacies, Morocco's post-Independence politics have been characterized by struggles over the relations between city and rural communities, as well as who has a "right to the city." In the wake of independence, during the post-colonial monarchy's state-led development programs, urban centers like Casablanca witnessed explosive internal immigration, with elite condescension toward rural populations now directed toward these new urban masses. The 1962 ascent of King Hassan II, and assertion of a new constitution that turned the nationalist Istiqlal into a permanent opposition party, provoked a new wave of student and labor organizing on the left.[21] A "new pop music" began to emerge during this period led by Nass al-Ghiwane, whose members hailed primarily from the lower-class Hay Mouhamedi neighborhood in Casablanca.[22] Their use of *darija*, the Arabic dialect of Morocco; references to traditional oral poetry known as *malhoun*; and incorporation of idioms from folk songs, Berber music, and the Gnawa native to sub-Saharan Africa immediately set them apart. Their subtle, politically subversive lyrics also served to inspire opposition movements even as Hassan II's regime responded with increasing violence, forced disappearances, and torture in secretive prisons—a period (1975–1990) known as the "Years of Lead." [23] Younger generations of Moroccans are still familiar with Nass al-Ghiwane's songs, which provided important political, if not musical, inspiration for the first generation of Moroccan rappers looking to root their music in local references and traditions.

An additional legacy of the French Protectorate's politics of separation has been the re-emergence of "the neighborhood" (*lhouma*, or *al-hawma* in classical Arabic), as a site of affiliation and source of identity construction. Of course, the genealogy of *lhouma* may not be strictly "colonial": Julia Clancy-Smith highlights the importance of affiliation based on *al-hawma* within the "cultural creole" atmosphere of nineteenth-century Tunis.[24] Yet Abu-Lughod also suggests that due to the Protectorate's "neglect" of urban upkeep, "neighborhoods handled many of their internal functions on a more ad hoc basis," thus presumably fostering highly localized social connections.[25] Alternatively glossed in colloquial Arabic as *al-zanka* ("the street" or "alley"), or even in French as *lboulvard*,[26]

ideas of the neighborhood continue to hold sway in many North African urban centers, organizing a (predominantly male) space of commerce and sociality separated from its supposedly hostile neighbors.[27]

Grappling with such historical legacies in the here-and-now, Moroccan hip-hop artists characterize life in *lhouma* as burdened with daily struggle. A popular example from the group H-Kayne, titled, simply "L'houma," laments the impoverishment of the urban poor, and the social ills that come along with such blight:

> In the neighborhood
> I will tell you what's going on
> In the neighborhood there is everything
> There are those who are unemployed
> And those who struggle to make ends meet...

After dropping a reference to Nass El-Ghiwane, the second verse continues:

> Open your ears
> Stop idling around the neighborhood
> Stop smoking and sniffing.[28]

Here the listener is urged to take responsibility and control of his own life, urged to "open your ears" and improve the neighborhood himself by quitting drugs. The lyrics of the song thus walk a fine line between acknowledging the problems of life in the urban slums and encouraging a subjectivity of modern citizenship where individuals take responsibility.

In the wake of structural adjustments of the 1980s and 1990s, the shift from Nass El-Ghiwane's more direct criticisms of the monarchy's oppressive politics to an emphasis on personal responsibility reflects a neoliberal ideology that dovetails with the regime's recent policy of cautious, top-down liberalization. Following his ascent to the throne in 1999, the current King Mohammed VI sought to increase state support for cultural productions—particularly of formerly marginalized cultural forms like Berber and Gnawa musical traditions—as part of a distinct move away from the "Years of Lead" associated with his father. Especially after the 2003 bombings in Casablanca, the state began to see hip-hop as a way of steering urban youth away from Islamic extremism and other violent countercultures, and thus hip-hop festivals began to emerge as an important node in the *makhzen*'s matrix of cultural production. Like Nass al-Ghiwane before them, the hip-hop artists who are imbricated in this matrix take up vital social problems in their music and are often critical of authorities. As Kendra Salois argues, however, their lyrics and "stage talk" cast such problems in subjective terms, citing the personal responsibility of each individual citizen to help solve the problems he or she faces.[29]

Another cornerstone of Muhammad VI's supposed moderation has been a performative display of support for women's rights, particularly in the form of revisions to the "Personal Status Code" (*mudawwana*) that regulates marriage and family law. This shapes the spaces within which female hip-hop artists like Soultana, another member of the so-called "first generation" of Moroccan rappers, must operate. The title of Soultana's song "Sawt Nssa'" ("Women's Voice") seems at first glance to play into post-9/11 transnational tropes about the "liberation" of women in Muslim societies but in fact takes a common object of conservative Moroccan moral panic, the prostitute, and turns the usual power dynamic on its head, telling the story of the "street girl" (*bint al-zanqa*) from her perspective.[30] The song has no official video, and numerous fan videos have been purged from YouTube by authorities.[31] As Salois points out, however, Soultana's political interjection follows a rhetoric similar to that of her peers H-Kayne and Bigg. Soultana makes this position explicit in an interview with Dutch video journalist Margo De Haas. Acknowledging the legitimacy of the recent political unrest in Morocco, she argues that

> Fifty percent, it's a problem of the government, and fifty percent it's the problem of the people because the people need to cultivate themselves, they need to educate themselves. And I think if you can change just a little bit of your entourage, maybe that entourage will change the world.[32]

Though paralleling H-Kayne's emphasis on personal responsibility, Soultana's statement speaks implicitly to the challenges artists of such a globalized musical form face in positioning their *local* political critiques within transnational, neoliberalizing discourses.

In addition to such transnational geopolitics, Moroccan hip-hop artists must negotiate other aspects of the state's ambiguously liberalizing policies. Some scholars, for example, have suggested that previously-subversive musical genres like Gnawa and hip-hop have now become subject to larger process of "festivalization" that repackage local performance cultures for elite and transnational consumption while linking them to postcolonial forms of audiovisual surveillance.[33] Using the Fez Festival of Sacred Music as an example, Taieb Belghazi argues that such state-sponsored, transnationally oriented festivals serve as "a meta-statement about the social order" through which "the city presents a selective version of its material counterpart."[34] If large-scale urban "development" projects and the recuperation of urban "slums" have both become sites for the retrenchment of authoritarian governance, it is important to question which urban populations such "festivalizations" are intended to serve.[35] Put differently, if H-Kayne is urging listeners to "open your ears" to *lhouma*, thus framing the neighborhood as a space of *sonic* and other *sensory* interaction, to whose "selective version" of the city are we listening? How do hip-hop videos frame that aural relation for us, and to what political ends? The remainder of the paper takes up H-Kayne's injunction as an analytical mode, shifting away from lyrical analysis to consider in more detail how a small sampling of more

recent music videos not only constructs *lhouma* sensorially, but in doing so suggest different ethics of *hearing lhouma* that are contested across class identities.

Neighborhood Vibes: Audio-Visual Constructions of *l-Houma*

Building on the success of artists like H-Kayne and Soultana, the early 2000s ushered in a new generation of hip-hop artists committed to rapping in the local Arabic dialect of *darija*, backed in many cases by much more sophisticated production aesthetics and more elaborate video sets. Mohamed Mezouri, for example, known by the stage name Muslim, and his contemporary Don Bigg (examined in the next section) best represent this trend. Their videos regularly garner several million views on YouTube with viewer comments primarily in *darija*—sometimes in Arabic script, sometimes transliterated in Latin characters —mirroring the lyrical content of the songs and suggesting a predominantly Moroccan public. Although at times critical of the Moroccan state's security apparatus and other forms of class dominance, many of their videos rework H-Kayne's rhetoric of social responsibility into audiovisual representation. As the production quality of such videos has converged with the standards of transnational pop, a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward urban lifeworlds has emerged in hip-hop videos.

To set up the aesthetics and political stakes of this contrast, it might be helpful to first consider a similar audio-visual construction of urban space from the Moroccan international pop sensation Ahmed Chawki. The Tétouan native is known for a number of international hits, including a 2015 remix of Dr. Alban's early '90s hit "It's My Life" and the 2013 crossover smash "Habibi, I Love You," featuring Cuban-American rap sensation Pitbull. Both videos are dripping with opulence: Chawki can be seen strolling by the pool of a modernist, glass-walled mansion, or dancing on the foredeck of a large powerboat surrounded by bikini-clad models. Such deterritorialized scenes of international luxury give subtle endorsement to the Moroccan state's increasingly neoliberal economic policies. The video for "Tsunami," however, performs a different neoliberal aesthetic, offering up a sensory reconstruction of Marrakech that draws on local cultural references repackaged for tourist consumption.

In the video for "Tsunami," Chawki's producers spend several long seconds orienting audiences sonically rather than visually. The video opens with just over a second of blackness, accompanied by a soft scraping sound. The opening image reveals the source of the scraping: a cart carrying a speaker is dragged across the brick pavement, the sound coming from the small plastic wheels. A second shot gives a brief glimpse of market-style tents, of unidentified human activity. Vaguely comprehensible verbal exchanges filter into

our auditory field from all directions—the video limits visual engagement in an attempt at sonic immersion. Suddenly, the camera cuts to an image overhead, revealing Marrakech's famous Jam'a al-Fna square, drenched in sunlight yet not overly crowded, with Chawki in the center of the frame, dragging his PA system. More sounds are accompanied by their visual referents: a dreadlocked man on a unicycle juggles torches crackling with fire; an older man in *jelaba* blows a few notes on a reed instrument; a jingling bell is revealed to belong to an elderly man in a colorful Berber hat. A quick shot of the square overhead is followed by the sounds and visuals of the PA turning on—a click, a buzz, a quick tap on the microphone (0:23).

The song begins with a bell-like synthesizer playing a minor key melody that foreshadows the song's verse, backed only by soft synthesizer pads (0:30). The camera watches Chawki from overhead as he steps to the microphone, an act that within the video narrative seems to attract a diverse cast of listeners, from men in *jellaba*s to blonde women in tank tops. Some squint, point, or move toward the center of the square. The aural and visual narrative of the film thus follows what Brian Larkin claims to be one of the sound system's most interesting aspects, namely its tendency to draw attention to itself.[36] All at once (0:45), the camera centers Chawki, a heavier synthesizer beat drops in, and Chawki belts out the song's first chorus. Equally important, the seemingly quotidian street sounds are suddenly silenced to make way for the highly polished, recorded track. The camera angle alternates between the overhead shot and one parallel with Chawki and his audience. From overhead we see throngs of people begin to circle around Chawki, clapping to the beat. Two different reed players from the opening seconds of the video are shown miming along to a reed melody on the recorded track. Thus, despite the lack of street sounds and heavy polish of the track, the video nonetheless evokes a "local" soundscape through indexical aural-visual pairing. Toward the end of the second chorus (1:52) of "Tsunami" another sound is added to the video's audio track: the flapping blades of a helicopter, soon seen circling above. The camera cuts to the view from the helicopter, then a close-up on a man hanging out the window, who reports (in English): "Live from Morocco! Live from Marrakech! What's going on here? Ahmed Chawki's going crazy! It's tsunami love."

However, while the voice from the helicopter might be intended to index the sounds and speech acts of news production, I would suggest it can be listened to "against the grain" as a more subtle reinforcement of the video's surveillance aesthetics. Surveillance of urban space of course has deep colonial legacies as well, as the need for easy visualization and movement of military forces motivated many of the city planning techniques that Abu-Lughod identifies in the Protectorate's "urban apartheid." Although the histories of port cities like Rabat and Casablanca do not necessarily apply directly to Marrakech, the video still performs this type of surveillance in a more contemporary mode, repeatedly interspersing "ground-level" shots with views from overhead, some explicitly framed to

situate the viewer's perspective *in* the helicopter. Moreover, this surveillance perspective is extended sonically, as the static-drenched voice of the man in the helicopter might just as easily be heard as a *voice* of surveillance. The rapper Don Bigg's song "16/04," for example, dramatizes a conversation between a security officer and one of the 2003 Casablanca bombers, employing static to present the voice of the officer as technologically mediated.[37] The visual and aural effect of Chawki's video thus demonstrates the affinity between an aesthetic of "festivalization" and the forms of technological surveillance that allow the state and other elite actors to organize urban space according to its logics.

Music video for Ahmed Chawki's 'Tsunami'

Although scholars suggest that such "festivalization" has helped propel hip-hop's popularization in Morocco, videos of the rapper Muslim organize urban space quite differently. Signed to Kachela Records, the Tangier native is by far the label's best-selling artist, outpacing other notable rappers with transnational followings like L'Arabe and Mojahid. In an interview on the Moroccan talk-show "Rachid," Muslim tells the audience and host Rachid Allali and about his musical background and his introduction to rap, which came through trips to New York City and other cosmopolitan centers of hip-hop culture. In doing so, Muslim foregrounds a different transnational identity than Chawki, one linked to the "origin myth" of hip-hop that is central to the production of "local" hip-hop movements even as they situate the genre's origins "elsewhere."[38] The videos for songs like "Al-Rissala" ("The Message") and "L'Marhoum" ("The Dead") are dense with iconographic indicators of urban space like city rooftops and graffiti-covered walls. Such symbolic references present a grittier, more "underground" sense of urban space than Chawki's Marrakech but one that is simultaneously deterritorialized, evoking a vague sense of

lhouma without making overt reference to Morocco. In other words, while Chawki's "Tsunami" constructs a multicultural vision of Marrakech as a *specific* urban locality, Muslim offers up a *generalized* cityscape whose iconic references nonetheless carry *specific* resonance within a different transnational musical network.

The video for Muslim's "Dmou3 L7awma," ("Tears of the Neighborhood"), constructs a similarly "delocalized" sense of urban space, in part through various indexical audio-visual crossovers that *teach* the listener-viewer *how* to "open their ears."[39] Directed by Mehdi El Hachimi, the video's reception on YouTube attests to Muslim's popularity, having garnered over four million views in the first four months after its posting in January 2016, now exceeding a staggering 45.5 million plays.[40] The song opens with a soft, plodding, echo-drenched electronic drum track with a minor key synthesizer melody rising in pitch to the opening verse. The establishing shot pans over a mass of densely crowded buildings which, though vaguely reminiscent Muslim's hometown of Tangier, give little other sense of locality. In the next frame a prepubescent boy in a dirty sweat suit enters dejectedly, taking a seat in a corner surrounded by peeling, white-washed walls. Next, a spray-painted English translation of the song's title as "Tears of the Hood" appears on another wall, which subsequently becomes a backdrop for Muslim's mimetic vocal performances throughout the video. "How do you want to begin?" Muslim raps, backed by decrepit concrete architecture. "How do you want me to keep silent while the neighborhood is dying (*l-houma katmout*)?"[41] Even before the video's visual narrative gets underway, the neighborhood is presented as an uninviting place, dark, dirty, and cramped, while the muted drum-and-synthesizer track contributes a quiet sense of foreboding.

Watching "Dmou3 L7ouma" alongside Chawki's "Tsunami" video, which YouTube seems to suggest we could, produces a number of stark contrasts.[42] In costuming, physical setting, and lighting, Chawki's Marrakech is bright and colorful while Muslim's Tangier is bleak. While "Tsunami" depicts Marrakech as open and sunny, with a diverse range of people, Muslim's *houma* is foreboding, with dark alleyways and decrepit buildings guarded by greedy gatekeepers. Even the overhead shots in each video, which give us the view of De Certeau's "voyeur-god,"[43] offer contrasting images of urban space—the sunny and open Marrakech versus the jumble of whitewashed houses that we see in "Dmou3 L7ouma." The sonic contrast is equally stark. Marrakech is full of lively voices, "traditional" instruments, and—when the music starts—joyous clapping. Muslim's neighborhood is infused with the sounds of human and animal violence and weeping so ubiquitous that residents become numb to its meaning. Meanwhile, the recurring visual appearance of the song's title in English situates the song's narrative and video's urban representations within transnational hip-hop discourses on "the hood" and the struggles of its residents.

As the song progresses, "The 'Hood" emerges as an increasingly violent presence both visually and aurally. A man with a "Cash Money" sweatshirt blocks a woman from entering an apartment in the neighborhood and seizes her purse (0:55), the lyrics framing this act as a pimp taking his cut from a "girl of the streets." The visuality of his "guard dog"-like role is mimicked in subsequent frames by a salivating Rottweiler barking in time to the music, vocalized on the track by shouted male background vocals (1:07; 1:10). Just as critics of "the voice" in anthropology and ethnomusicology have noted its seeming location at the boundary of human politics and non-human soundings, here the "crossing" of human and animal vocalities foregrounds the danger of the *l-houma*'s sonic ecology over any sort of communicative relationship.[44] Rather than bursting forth with energy like a typical pop chorus, the "Dmou3 L7ouma" chorus (1:19) eliminates the electronic snare and cymbals from the verse, leaving only a simple bassline and bass-drum beat with heavily-muted equalization. The camera returns to the bird's-eye view of the crowded neighborhood, then cuts to a dark alley while Muslim's rapping retreats into a plaintive lament:

> Tears of the neighborhood stream down...
> I hear its weeping (*bakiya*) because it seizes my imagination (*khiyali*).

The sudden drop in the intensity of the backing track mimics the neighborhood's weeping. Muslim repeats the lyrics in a more urgent, imploring manner during the second half of the chorus, which reintroduces the heavier beat and imposing synthesizer track. Muslim does not "hear" these tears in a physical sense, however, nor are they, as seems to be the implication, "audible" socially—they emerge only in Muslim's imagination. As Revill points out, "Though sounds and particularly those sounds coded as voices worthy of attention are often diffuse and pervasive, [they] provide points of active, focused listening."[45] Here, however, although Muslim is foregrounding the "voices" of victims of urban blight as "worthy of attention," he is doing so *indexically*: we do not "hear" tears *in* the video, but are invited to *imagine* them just like Muslim. As such, the indexing of tears draws us less into an *experience* of urban life, and more into a certain pedagogical orientation—that is, a *mode* of listening to *lhouma*.

The verse that follows (1:50) reinforces this audile relationship. Muslim begins each line with the phrase "The neighborhood weeps for a son," transforming the act of weeping into one that is both collective and frequent (in its repetition). The sound of weeping thus changes register from what Schafer calls a "signal noise"—one that carries meaning by drawing attention to a particular object or event—into a "keynote" sound, one that is perceived unconsciously yet "forms a background against which all other sounds are perceived."[46] This shift has important political implications, however: as an accepted aspect of one's sonic "background," "keynote" sounds are rarely attended to as objects of political concern or reparation. Muslim is in effect trying to reverse this. When the song drops back into the softer, more melancholic chorus a second time (2:52), this weeping is

dramatized visually: the camera pans from an ambulance's flashing lights, which index the sound of the accompanying siren, to a veiled middle-aged woman surrounded by a comforting crowd weeping over her dead son. Here, the video shifts from the "tears of the hood" heard only in *Muslim*'s imagination (as in the first chorus), to an invitation to the video's *audience* to "hear" those tears, now indexed visually by the (silent) mother on the screen.

Music video for Muslim's 'Dmou3 L7ouma'

This progression suggests an important point about the *pedagogical* implications of Muslim's song and video. The video works through the distinctly "intersensorial" way in which most people comprehend not just urban space, but even sound as a seemingly isolated phenomenon. As Steve Connor suggests in a brief historical essay on the origins of the telephone "the senses are multiply related; we rarely if ever apprehend the world through one sense alone."[47] The point then, as Connor argues further, is not simply to *identify* such intersensorial relations, but also to excavate *how* the different senses are related under particular conditions. "Relations between sound and sight may be said to be largely indexical," he says, meaning that "sight often acts to interpret, fix, limit, and complete the evidence of sound."[48] The Dmou3 L7awma video is fecund with such audio-visual convergences, from the mimetic vocalization of guard dogs acting as a sonic barrier to the "hood," to lyrical and visual indexing of individual and collective "tears." However, the juxtaposition of the crying mother in the second chorus and the (disembodied) repeated crying in the verse before introduces a tension: on the one hand, the weeping is an embodied response to real lives lost; on the other, the ubiquity of the sound of weeping threatens to turn it into a mere "keynote," a sound that recedes into the general din of

urban life. Therefore, the shift from Muslim's imagination to that of the audience performs an important pedagogical task of turning the responsibility of making such weeping "heard" back on the viewer-listener.

Muslim's objective, then, is to breach collective inattention and to motivate listeners to change their beleaguered society. In an interview with the English-language news site *All Africa*, Muslim frames the "message" of his aptly-titled album *Al-Rissala* as a call "to revolt against anything negative in our lives, or anything that can have negative psychological effects." Asked about "the best and worst traits of young people," Muslim cites "their creative potential" on the one hand and "their despair or pessimism" on the other.[49] Sounds of distress like the sirens and a mother's weeping remain silent against Muslim's recorded track, their visual presence reminding listeners, as in the H-Kayne lyric, to "open their ears." The soundscape of the "Dmou3 L7ouma" video thus performs a similar function as rappers' "stage talk" in live performance, beckoning to fans to "listen" (*isma'*) to their urban surroundings. Kendra Salois argues that the way rappers harness such stage talk to injunctions to take personal responsibility for correcting social ills legitimizes the neoliberal ideologies that underpin the Moroccan state's recent shift in economic policy.[50] But while "stage talk" may be one technique through which hip-hop artists engage a listener's moral sensibility, here I want to argue that it is precisely Dmou3 L7awma's *indexical* construction of an urban "soundscape" that *teaches the listener how* to "open their ears." Since the "tears of the hood" are not made physically audible in the song's recorded track, their visual indexing forces us to attune to *what they might* sound like—that is, to render the inaudible "audible" through our own responsive listening.

Contested Soundscapes: "Voicing" Dissent and Resisting "Festivalization"

The widespread "Arab Spring" uprisings of 2011 that swept across the MENA/SWANA region changed the politics of hip-hop somewhat, elevating the voices of local rappers as political dissidents yet also rendering the genre subject to romanticization in global media discourse and, in some cases, cooptation by statist and other elite actors. Across those countries that experienced massive protests, local youth and foreign pundits alike rallied behind "revolutionary" artists like Tunisian rapper El General, whose arrest by the Ben Ali regime's security forces following the release of "Rais Lebled" amplified that song as the seeming anthem of the Tunisian uprising. As Rayya El Zein points out, however, the tendency of global media to romanticize the power of El General's music and message recycles orientalist tropes. "The Arab rapper "speaking truth to power" is an exciting, suddenly modern figure when imagined as emerging from out of the dust, backwardness, and oppression that is otherwise understood to characterize the Middle East and its

politics."[51] Working in the context of early 2000s and 2010s Senegal, Catherine Appert offers a similar critique, arguing that reducing hip-hop's social function to one of political "resistance" elides *other* important ways in which the genre is made meaningful in the lives of practitioners and audiences.[52]

Given the different legacy of the "Arab Spring" in Morocco compared with places like Egypt and Tunisia, however, the general idea of "resistance" and its association with different hip-hop trends is differently configured. Although the monarchy and its security apparatus, known collectively as the *makhzen*, seemed to diffuse the initial wave of local anti-regime protests, self-identified as the February 20 movement, with modest constitutional reforms, many Moroccans continued to voice dissent through mass protests and citizen journalism outlets like *Mamfakinch* (roughly translatable as "No Concessions"). It should come as no surprise, therefore, to see hip-hop break along similar political lines, with some rappers extending appeals to the mass public to improve their urban lifestyles through ethical listening, while others have taken a more direct approach to criticizing the existing regime, even after the 2011 reforms.

One notable example of this trend comes from Don Bigg, one of the "first generation" of rappers, featured in the *I Love Hip Hip in Morocco* festival and documentary that included H-Kayne, Muslim, and Soultana. To be sure, while some of Don Bigg's songs take up similar pedagogies of urban uplift as evident in the works of Muslim and H-Kayne, others take a much more critical tone toward the abuses of the state and its security apparatus, even if they avoid the taboo of criticizing the monarchy directly. Bigg's aforementioned song "16/05," for example, from his 2009 album *White and Black* (*Bayd u K7al*), comments on the 2003 bombings of three Casablanca hotels that left forty-five dead and dozens more injured by humanizing the bombers as victims of economic abandonment. After a brief intro featuring a static-drenched imaginary radio exchange between state security officers and one of the bombers, Bigg ventriloquizes the voice of one of the bombers, rapping about experiences of economic and political abandonment.[53] The video for Bigg's song "I Don't Want It" (*Mabgitch*), meanwhile, released in the aftermath of February 20, 2011, splices images of sexual and moral depravity with overt visual references to imprisonment and state-inflicted torture.[54] Both tracks therefore call out the state for its combined abandonment and securitization of Morocco's urban poor. Even if its critique of the neoliberal order in the "voice" of the bomber is merely implicit, "16/05" does suggest that someone *besides* the city's impoverished are at fault for their condition, and in that provides a contrast to the works of H-Kayne and Muslim.

The video for Don Bigg's track "TJR," however, offers a very different commentary on the politics of urban living, in part by shifting its main point of reference to the rural countryside as a source of urban renewal—a reversal of certain colonial and postcolonial politics.

Directed by Sebastien Rossi and featuring the Moroccan-French singer Ahmed Soultan, the video garnered roughly 2.6 million views on YouTube in just over a year, now standing at more than six million.[55] The visual opening is strikingly ostentatious for such an at-times subversive artist, zooming in from a bird's eye view onto a cluster of Casablanca's luxury high-rises, which dwarf the otherwise-massive Hassan II Mosque in the distance. The camera enters the penthouse balcony of one such building, where Bigg is talking agitatedly on the phone. We follow the rapper inside as he concludes the conversation, hangs up, and beckons to his young son to leave. We next see them in an old red sedan, driving out into the country as a solo piano fades in, playing a medium-tempo minor-key vamp with chromatic inflection. So far, the visual construction of the city is the elevated, "voyeur-God" view of the urban planner,[56] depicting a decidedly affluent way of life. On that surface level, at least, Bigg's is a much more objectifying depiction of the city, eschewing any direct engagement with *lhouma* as a countercultural space at all. Meanwhile, the lengthy car scene and musical introduction suggest a sense of separation and *distance* between city and countryside.

As Bigg slides into rapping the first verse, he and Soultan are shown out in a field. The beat of the song is up-tempo, Bigg's raspy, throaty vocalizations juxtaposed with Soultan's crooner-esque, almost whispered, melodic choruses. Clips of the two performers are interspersed with scenes of rural hardship and poverty. We enter the scene of a woman giving birth, lying on a worn mattress on the floor of a plain hut. While Bigg's lyrics up until this point suggest he is a distant descendant of the woman being depicted, the opacity of the lyrics and pronoun usage makes the exact relationship unclear. The suffering on her face is palpable but we quickly cut to one of even greater emotional tension. An older woman, either the midwife or new grandmother (or both) lets out the familiar trill that often hails new beginnings like births and marriages (1:54). As with the weeping in Muslim's video, however, we "hear" this call indexically: though silent behind Bigg's recorded track, the slow-motion movement of the older woman's mouth—tongue lightly flicking teeth and lips, hand cupped around for amplification—evokes the well-known sound in the viewer's mind. Other visual cues invest the performance with added emotional weight: the older woman's strained look makes palpable an ambivalence between the joy of new life, on the one hand, and on the other, the anxiety of not knowing whether the young mother will survive her child's birth—a matter that will be resolved tragically by video's end.

The rest of the video proceeds through two parallel father-son visual narratives, featuring the father from the earlier birth scene cut with shots of Bigg and his own son. The imagery, most of it in slow motion, evokes pastoralism and cultural authenticity: Bigg and his son pray together in the village's humble mosque; a cloaked man reading Qur'an pulls back his hood to reveal Ahmed Soultan's face. As the song draws to a close (4:52), Bigg and his son stroll through the cemetery. Father and son stop at one grave in particular as the rhythm

track fades out. Bigg looks at his son, points to the grave, and then upward, suggesting the family member's *return* to the divine. As the background vocals on the track ascend and begin to trail off, however, the camera seems to *follow* Bigg's direction, panning over the graveyard and bringing the neighborhood mosque into frame. At this moment, Bigg's gesture seems to converge with the camera's visualization of the mosque to indicate something else: the Islamic call-to-prayer, or *adhan*, is sounding. The sound, once again unheard except in the viewer's imagination, provides a sonic counterpoint to the earlier images of religious practice.

The video's aural and visual narrative thus recapitulates Schafer's moralistic critique of the decline of "hi-fi" soundscapes associated with rural life into "lo-fi" urban cacophony. The video itself seems to perform this critique through indexical sonic ordering: by incorporating "unheard" sounds such as the mosque and the midwife's trilling into the viewer-listeners *imagined* soundscape, the producers of the video, like those of Muslim's "Dmou3 L7ouma," actually expand the sonic richness of the video beyond what is strictly included in the musical track. This sonic richness, accompanied by scenes of rural life, suggests a shift "back" to a "hi-fi" soundscape of life outside the city, one where the sounds of birth and the *adhan* are not only still heard but also still carry meaning. Thus, while "Dmou3 L7ouma" urges listeners to take responsibility for improving urban life by *opening* their ears to its sounds, Bigg's video offers a retreat to the countryside and its culturally "authentic" soundscape as a form of moral uplift.

Music video for Don Bigg's 'TJR'

In contrast to the "festivalization" of some of Morocco's hip-hop pioneers, other rappers gave voice to ongoing post-2011 dissent. One of the most outspoken members of this movement, Mouad Belghouat, rapping under the name El Haqed ("The Indignant"), served three separate jail terms spanning 2011 to 2015 for his fairly direct criticism of the *makhzen* in songs like "Dogs of the State" (*Klab al-Dawla*) and "No More Silence" (*Baraka Men Skat*).[57] Though the language of international reporting on El-Haqed suggests that he is no less subject to a romanticized resistance narrative, the rapper's antagonistic relationship with the regime has only strengthened his reputation, expressed by fans in various online fora, as an artist who avoids "whitewashing" or "sugarcoating" the experiences of Morocco's urban poor. With this political context in mind, this final analytical section of the paper will focus on the video for El-Haqed's song "Walou," meaning "Nothing." Although "Dogs of the State" and "No More Silence" may offer more politically charged lyrical content, I hope to show that "Walou" cuts a more striking contrast to artists like Muslim and Don Bigg by actually refusing the "festivalization" impulses of the Moroccan state and cultural elites in much subtler terms.

The official video for "Walou" delays the beginning of the song itself a full minute, allowing time for a range of non-musical sounds to orient the viewer-listener in a particular, ambiguously urban space.[58] In the video's opening seconds the camera seems to struggle to come into focus, foregrounding sound in the viewer's experience. A song plays in the background, highly compressed and distorted, evoking the sound of a cheap radio. Two or three motorbikes seem to whiz by, panning stereophonically from one ear to another. These "keynotes," extracted from their actual setting, in fact act as signals that begin to orient the viewer-listener in a particular sonic environment. The camera, in a washed out gray, finally comes into focus on an abandoned lot next to a plain concrete slab building. Clotheslines are strung across the open space, which is also littered with trash. The abandoned lot and piles of trash materialize the waste of capitalist over-production and consumption. The landscape has neither the visual appeal of Chawki's Marrakech nor the assaultive presence of Muslim's *houmas* of Tangier. The visual and aural landscape that emerges is instead that of Casablanca's impoverished, peri-urban periphery—a space that has been subject to cinematic tropes linking such economic abandonment to moral degeneracy. The well-known French-Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch, for example, who burst onto the international film scene by depicting that lifeworld in *Ali Zaoua: Prince of the Streets* (2000), returned to the subject in 2012 with *Horses of God*, a fictionalized retelling of the upbringing and religious radicalization of the 2003 Casablanca bombers. In that film, characters evoke "the city" (*al-madina*)—never explicitly named as Casablanca—as a space of both economic opportunity as well as moral and political corruption.

The opening framing of "Walou" seems to hint at a similar rhetoric of personal moral responsibility as found in the music of Muslim, Soultana, and H-Kayne. A quote from El

Haqed appears on the screen (0:15): "If you are someone who has a weak intellect (*al-'uqul al-da'ifa*) or are among those who flee from reality . . . Your mind is a prison . . ." However, as the text of El Haqed's message fades from the screen, a number of visual and aural queues begin to lead us into a more distinctly urban space (0:23). As the song continues to play from the cheap radio, a rooster struts across the brick pavement. Children's voices sound from multiple directions, echoing through the narrow, reverberant alleys of the medina. The camera gets into the face of three men in one of these alleyways, each of them insisting, repetitively, "There's nothing here, nothing" (*ma kayn walou*). As the three men retreat, their refrain of "walou" fades into the song's recorded track and El Haqed's own voice, accompanied by a shot of the rapper on a city bus (1:02). The song's rhythm track is much more reserved than Muslim's "Dmou3 L7ouma," featuring a tighter drum beat, sparse bassline, and samples of light, bell-like organ and muted funk guitar lines.

El Haqed's rapping often lags slightly behind the beat, evoking the forced leisure of unemployment. There is no chorus to speak of, or discernable structure to the song in general, though frequent repetitions of "walou" anchor the song in a sort of lyrical mantra. El Haqed's wordplay is skillful, occasionally shifting other line-ending vowels into an "ou" sound to rhyme with a subsequent interjection of "walou." The vocal tracking, meanwhile, reproduces the scattered children's shouts of the video's introduction: although El Haqed's lead vocal dominates, each vocalization of "walou" is done ensemble. This chorus vocalization is mimed in different shots by a diverse cross-section of neighborhood residents—a young child, a tea seller, a woman in *niqab*,[59] a group of young men playing soccer. Occasionally El Haqed's lines are multi-tracked, saturated with reverb, and placed in a surround-sound setting, mimicking the audio effect of playing children sampled in the video's introduction. In short, both the song structure and its layering and placement of voices resist any post/colonial politics of social engineering: there is no overarching social order, only people's voices.

In addition to this aural resistance to an engineered social order, the accompanying visuals and the rhetorical force of the repeated "walou" also oppose the politics of colonial display. As Zeynep Celik has argued, visual conquest of private urban spaces was an important underlying aspect of French conquest of Algeria and North Africa more generally.[60] The camera movement during the introduction of "Walou" rehearses this optical power play, not only entering the narrow alley of the *medina* but quite viscerally entering the personal space of the three men as well. At the same time, their insistence that "There's nothing here" (*ma kayn walou*) resists the type of visual engagement that seeks mastery through entry into private spaces. Occasionally, El Haqed's lyrics similarly challenge the commodification of urban space. "What is this tourism?" (*ee da al-sahafa*) he asks at one point (1:27). "No culture, no arts!" he raps later (2:04). The video's narrative puts an exclamation on this statement once the song is finished, showing one of the three men

from the introduction leaning out of a window, taking the last gulp from a bottle of liquor and then waving the camera off one last time. He shouts a number of phrases at the viewer, including *"dakhl souq raseq,"* a colloquialism which translates literally as "go to the market of your head" but means, in essence, "mind your own business." Then one more time: *"Ma kayn walou!"*

The sounds and sights of urban life brought forth by El Haqed differ not just from Chawki's video but from those of other rappers as well. While Muslim puts the violence of *lhouma* on display for the pedagogical purposes of making neighborhood residents aware of their social ills, El-Haqed not only resists the surveillance implicit in Chawki's "Tsunami" but also implicitly questions Dumou3 L7ouma's pedagogies. The "neighborhood" has no lessons to teach because there is "nothing" there. The word "Walou" is thus utilized in multiple ways, as a commentary on the impoverishment of those living in Casablanca's peripheries and as a critique of the colonial and postcolonial power structures that seek control through audio-visual capture. The politics of this relationship are borne out sonically as well. In Muslim's video, the audible soundscape of the recorded track—incessant, foreboding—and the barking dog signal danger, while the sounds of sirens and weeping are left "silent," evoked in the listener's imagination through visual cues. This suggests a certain connection between such indexical constructions of urban sound and the pedagogical labor they perform: the "heard" sounds of danger press the listener into action, to "open his ears" to the "unheard" sounds of the neighborhood's tears. El Haqed and his peers have no purpose and no agency, they are not "going" anywhere—as symbolized by the rapper pretending to drive a stalled jeep. All they have are the sounds of children, of roosters, of motorbikes, sounds that simply exist as the pure keynotes of everyday life. Situated within the larger context of El Haqed's political critique, "Walou" seems to interpellate state authorities and other elites who must open *their* ears to the everyday soundscapes experienced by Morocco's poor—and perhaps to address such ills *without* seeking cultural appropriation.

Music video for El Haqed's 'Walou'

Compared to Don Bigg's video, moreover, "Walou" offers such subtle critiques in part through a more nuanced construction of urban-rural relations. By showing the poverty of rural life, exemplified in the mother's death during childbirth, Bigg may on the one hand be attempting to create a shared sense of suffering between rural and urban underclasses, perhaps even to recuperate the latter through a "return" to their rural origins. Yet by locating cultural authenticity in the countryside, the "T-JR" video nonetheless reinforces the depravity of urban life: Bigg and his son must literally leave the city to reconnect with their cultural roots. This narrative, though not as overtly "touristic" as Chawki's video, nonetheless reconstitutes an "extractive" relationship between an exclusively upper-class urbanite population and the countryside. Even in the world constructed by the "T-JR" video, the suffering of the rural poor is not alleviated by the intervention of Bigg and his son. Moreover, it perpetuates the classist bias of Schafer's own critique, presenting a "return" to the "hi-fi" soundscape of the countryside as a possible "escape" from urban alienation. Either way, Don Bigg and his son—or their onscreen versions—are the exclusive beneficiaries. In short, Muslim and Bigg present different pedagogies of urban life to different classes: the middle- and lower-classes who are made responsible for their own moral (and economic) uplift; and elites who are offered the "escape" of the countryside's "hi-fi" soundscape.

In contrast to Muslim and Don Bigg, as well as to El Haqed's more overtly "political" tracks like "Dogs of the State" and "No More Silence," "Walou," finally, performs a more subtle political move of elevating urban soundworlds *without* the added baggage of moralizing rhetoric. The song and the video do this in part by incorporating peri-urban residents into

the visual performance of the video with very little curation or visual narrative to speak of. When the actual "voices" of neighborhood residents are incorporated into the mix, it is primarily through acts of refusal, that there is "nothing" for the visitor to see. Beyond this basic quotidian sensibility, however, I also want to suggest that the video's politics are enacted through its evasion of the kind of indexical audio-visual constructions that "Dmou3 L7awma" and "T-JR" rely on. Audio-visual parallels are largely *mimetic* rather than indexical, with various urban residents mouthing El Haqed's many interjections of "Walou." In this way El Haqed allows the urban collective to "speak" through a pairing of his voice with the many, rather than teaching the audience the responsibility of "hearing" the *houma* —and thus rendering it subject to moral uplift—through their own aural imagination. El Haqed suggests that listeners should "open their ears" to such soundworlds as they are, rather than as they *could be* for the exclusive purposes of their rehabilitation, "festivalization," or other forms fit for neoliberal consumption.

Conclusion: Hip-Hop, Listening, and Decoloniality

In this paper, I have examined a small sample of Moroccan hip-hop videos as a way of opening up new theoretical opportunities for understanding not just how sound and vision work in tandem within the genre, but also how that "audio-visual contract" may undergird particular political or ethical projects. I have argued that although lyrical and musical content remain salient, the videos themselves work through a distinctive form of audiovisual *synesthesia* to help construct a sensory experience of urban (and rural) space for the listener and viewer. In making this argument, I have tried to remain cognizant of the limitations of such an analysis, which I hope other scholars will take as provocation for future work. Though this analysis has focused on select videos where lyrical content and sensory constructions of urban space are more or less ideologically aligned, other scholarship might hone in on examples where the two elements sit in tension. Additionally, since most of these videos seem to employ the senses *pedagogically*, that is, to train the viewer-listener to attend to urban space as a way of seeking particular moral and political ends, connecting such pedagogies to other ethnographic cases could be generative.

Nonetheless, I would reiterate that there are crucial differences between the videos of Muslim and Bigg on the one hand and El Haqed on the other, differences which demonstrate the importance of such audiovisual synesthesia for particular political orientations. Though unfolding in contrasting spaces of *lhouma* and the countryside, Muslim and Bigg's videos both build crucial elements of their respective soundscapes through *indexical* connections: we hear particular keynotes *because they show us how*, through visual or lyrical reference to "inaudible" elements they would nonetheless like us to "hear." By working through what Connor glosses as our tendency to listen indexically, to in

a sense "hear" what is not actually "there," sonically, those videos not only teach us *how* to listen, but also imply that such listening will help serve certain political ends. In fact, I would contend that the "T–JR" narrative of urban uplift through rural, cultural "extraction" raises questions about what sorts of political ends Muslim's injunction to hear the (inaudible) tears of the neighborhood is really for. Will hearing the *houma* benefit urban populations themselves? Or will it simply transform urban spaces into sites amenable to touristic consumption?

Keeping all of this in mind, the political implications of El Haqed's "Walou" go far beyond simply giving "voice" to the economically marginalized through the lived richness of its "everyday" soundtrack. In fact, other examples like Soultana's "Woman's Voice" or Bigg's "16/05" perform that task quite eloquently as well. Rather, El Haqed's "Walou" video, in its subtle framing of such a soundscape as containing "nothing" of import for cultural commodification, also refuses the (post)colonial impulse that would subsume such sound-worlds under contrasting neoliberal or "resistant" ideologies. As such, "Walou" challenges both Moroccan authoritarianism and a neoliberal politics of recognition. In doing so it further challenges scholarly approaches that would romanticize hip-hop's mythologization as a genre of "resistance," particularly after its admittedly important resonance during the 2011 uprisings. In drawing us into Casablanca's peri-urban sound-world yet constantly challenging our tendency to hear indexically, to "sound out" what may not actually be "there," El Haqed may be challenging scholars to resist *our own* desire to hear *only* hip-hop's resonances as a tool of "resistance," and to take in a broader array of its meanings and sonic resonance, in urban lifeworlds and beyond.

Notes

1. *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. 5: Marx and Engels: 1845-1847* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 42–43. ↩

2. David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). ↩

3. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5. ↩

4. Friedrich Kittler, "The City Is a Medium," trans. Matthew Griffin, *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 717–30, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1996.0051/ < https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1996.0051/> . ↩

5. Rowland Atkinson, "Ecology of Sound: The Sonic Order of Urban Space," *Urban Studies* 44, no. 10 (September 2007): 1905–1917, https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980701471901 < https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980701471901> . ↩

6. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1977). ↩

7. David W. Samuels, Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa, and Thomas Porcello, "Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): 329–345, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-022510-132230 < https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-022510-132230> . ↩

8. Michael P. Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011). ↵

9. Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Justin A. Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013). ↵

10. I adopt the MENA/SWANA label from the contributors to *Lateral*'s "Cultural Constructions of Race and Racism in the Middle East and North Africa/Southwest Asia and North Africa," as a way of "decenter{ing} the Americas and Europe as the cartographic center of the planet" while still recognizing that MENA remains much more recognizable as a geographic toponym. See Rayya El Zein, "Introduction: Cultural Constructions of Race and Racism in the Middle East and North Africa/Southwest Asia and North Africa," *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2021): https://doi.org/10.25158/L10.1.11 < https://doi.org/10.25158/L10.1.11> . ↵

11. David A. McDonald, "New Directions and New Modalities: Palestinian Hip-Hop in Israel," and "'Carrying Words Like Weapons': DAM Brings Hip-Hop to the West Bank," in *My Voice is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 231–281. ↵

12. Michael P. Jeffries, "Hip-Hop Urbanism Old and New," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (March 2014): 706–715, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12106 < https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12106> . ↵

13. Georgina Born, ed., *Music, Sound, and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). ↵

14. Michael Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press 1994; republished 2019), 68. ↵

15. Steve Connor, "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (New York: Berg, 2004), 206. ↵

16. Georgina Born, introduction to *Music, Sound, and Space*, 21. ↵

17. George Revill, "Vocalic Space," in *The Question of Space: Interrogating the Spatial Turn Between Disciplines*, ed. Marijn Nieuwenhuis and David Crouch (Lenham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 43–62. ↵

18. Edmund Burke, III. *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014). ↵

19. Alessandra Ciucci, *The Voice of the Rural: Music, Poetry, and Masculinity among Migrant Moroccan Men in Umbria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 22. ↵

20. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980). ↵

21. For more on Hassan II's reign, including the student protests and "Years of Lead" (mentioned below), see Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially 162–86. ↵

22. Aomar Boum, "Youth, Political Activism and the Festivalization of Hip-Hop Music in Morocco," in *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI*, ed. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (New York: Routledge, 2012), 165–66. ↵

23. John Schaefer, "Protest Song Morocaine," *Middle East Report* 263 (Summer 2012): 26–32, https://merip.org/2012/05/protest-song-marocaine/. ↵

24. Julia-Clancy-Smith. *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an age of migration, c. 1800–1900.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). ↵

25. Abu-Lughod, *Urban Apartheid*, 169. ↵

26. Boum, "Festivalization of Hip-Hop," 163. ↵

27. Tony Langlois, "Outside-In: Music, New Media and Tradition in North Africa," in *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, ed. David Cooper and Kevin Dawe (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 97–114. ↵

28. Quoted in Boum, "Festivalization of Hip-Hop," 163. ↵

29. Kendra Salois, "Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 1017–1048, https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2014.0054 < https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2014.0054> . ↵

30. Salois, "Make Some Noise, Drari," 1031. ↵

31. Salois, "Make Some Noise, Drari," 1031. ↵

32. Margo De Haas, "Soultana Raps for Change in Morocco," YouTube video, December 20, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTjM8wQ64nM < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTjM8wQ64nM> . ↵

33. See Boum, "Festivalization of Hip-Hop"; and Taieb Belghazi, "Festivalization of Urban Space in Morocco," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 97–107. ↵

34. Belghazi, "Festivalization of Urban Space," 106. ↵

35. Koenraad Bogaert, *Globalized Authoritarianism: Megaprojects, Slums, and Class Relations in Urban Morocco* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018). ↵

36. Brian Larkin, "Techniques of Inattention: The Mediality of Loudspeakers in Nigeria," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 990. ↵

37. Kendra Salois, "Jihad Against Jihad Against Jihad," *The New Inquiry*, October 17, 2012, https://thenewinquiry.com/jihad-against-jihad-against-jihad < https://thenewinquiry.com/jihad-against-jihad-against-jihad> . ↵

38. Catherine Appert, *In Hip-Hop Time: Music, Memory, and Social Change in Urban Senegal* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). ↵

39. When referring to titles of Arabic songs, I maintain their transliteration of certain Arabic characters using numerals, such as a 3 for the "'ayn," 7 for the hard "ha," and, in the Moroccan dialect, 9 for the "qaf." ↵

40. Muslim, "Dmou3 L7awma (Clip Officiel)," directed by Mehdi El Hachimi, YouTube video, posted January 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14DFUnHqdAw. ↵

41. Translations of lyrics are my own, unless otherwise cited. ↵

42. The appearance of the video for "Tsunami" in the list of suggestions on the right-hand side of the YouTube page for "Dmou3 L7ouma" suggests not only that viewers *could* watch the two alongside each other, but also that many of the same users *do* watch both videos. ↵

43. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*," trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 93. ↵

44. Revill, "Vocalic Space," 53. See especially Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). ↵

45. Revill, "Vocalic Space," 53. ↵

46. Schafer, *Soundscape*, 58–60. ↵

47. Connor, "Edison's Teeth," 153. ↵

48. Connor, "Edison's Teeth," 154–55. ↵

49. "Morocco: Rapper Muslim Delivers 'Message' to Youth," *All Africa*, July 14, 2014, http://allafrica.com/stories/201407151084.html < http://allafrica.com/stories/201407151084.html> . Since first access and transcription on May 3, 2016, the link has become subscription only. ↵

50. Salois, "Make Some Noise Drari." ↵

51. Rayya El Zein, "From 'Hip-Hop Revolutionaries' to 'Terrorist-Thugs': 'Blackwashing' between the Arab Spring and the War on Terror," *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (2016): https://doi.org/10.25158/L5.1.3 < https://doi.org/10.25158/L5.1.3> . ↵

52. Appert, *In Hip-Hop Time*. ↵

53. Salois, "Jihad Against Jihad Against Jihad." ↵

54. Don Bigg, "Mabghitch," directed by Khalid Douache, YouTube video, posted June 29, 2011, https://youtu.be/D3GMgKehhk0. ↵

55. Don Bigg, "Don Bigg – TJR feat. Ahmed Soultan (Official Audio)," directed by Sebastien Rossi, YouTube video, posted February 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww8YnecpzE4 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww8YnecpzE4> . ↵

56. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. ↵

57. For English-language reporting on El Haqed during this time, see Torie Rose DeGhett, "Morocco's Hip-Hop Revolutionary," *The Guardian*, Tuesday, April 17, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/17/el-haqed-morocco-hip-hop-revolutionary < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/17/el-haqed-morocco-hip-hop-revolutionary> . For an interview with the rapper following his release after his third arrest, see Samia Errazzouki, "Rap as Activism in Morocco: A STATUS/ Conversation between Mouad Belghouate (El-Haqed) and Samia Errazzouki," *Jadaliyya*, January 22, 2015, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31691. ↵

58. Mouad Belghoute. "L7a9ed – Walou (Clip Officiel) 2014," YouTube video, posted March 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT4yOKnT52I. ↵

59. A style of women's veiling that leaves only a slit exposed for the eyes. ↵

60. Zeynep Celik, "A Lingering Obsession: The Houses of Algiers in French Colonial Discourse," in *The Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City Through Text and Image*, ed. Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Tarpak (Los Angeles: Getty, 2009), 134–160. ↵

Author Information

Ian VanderMeulen

Ian VanderMeulen is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at Kalamazoo College and a research scholar interested in sound, media, Islam, and the politics of performance in the MENA/SWANA region. He holds a PhD in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from New York University, MA in Middle Eastern Studies from the City University of New York, and degrees in music and religion from Oberlin College. His research has been supported by NYU and the American Institute of Maghrib Studies and appears in *American Ethnologist* as well as the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In Fall 2023, Ian begins a Junior Research Fellowship at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University.

View all of Ian VanderMeulen's articles.

Article details